

Executive Summary	1
Introduction.....	4
Background.....	4
Methodology	5
Population	5
Response Rate.....	5
Constraints	5
Survey Development.....	6
Validity and Reliability.....	6
Dimensions	7
Categories	8
Instrument Design and Scales.....	8
Survey Findings.....	10
Customer Services Satisfaction.....	10
Overall Assessment.....	10
Openness and Honesty	10
Clarity of Directions	11
Politeness and Courtesy	11
Timeliness.....	12
Knowledge	13
Policies, Standards, and Regulations	14
Consistency of Service.....	14
Communication Preferences	15
Channeling of Unresolved Issues.....	16
Maintenance Awards Program.....	17
Compliance and Enforcement.....	18
Discussion of Strengths and Weaknesses	19
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	23

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To fulfill a strategic plan goal focused on customer service, in 2000 the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Flight Standards Service surveyed its customers. The stated purpose of the survey was to assess customer perceptions of the quality of Flight Standards' services. Flight Standards customers primarily interact with employees in Flight Standards District Offices (FSDO), Certificate Management Offices (CMO), and, to a lesser extent, regional and headquarters offices.

Flight Standards' Evaluation and Analysis Branch, AFS-130, developed the Customer Satisfaction Industry Survey (CSIS), administered CSIS nationwide, and analyzed the results. Flight Standards distributed the survey to executives, managers and officers at U.S. national and regional air carriers, repair stations, and aviation training facilities. For consistency purposes, the recipients were further categorized into four customer groups: Operations, Maintenance, Repair Stations, and Training. Of 16,065 surveys mailed nationwide to the four customer groups, they returned a total of 5,590 surveys, a 35 percent return rate.

The CSIS measured customer perceptions of Flight Standards services in 5 major areas: Customer Services Satisfaction, Communication Preferences, Channeling of Unresolved Issues, Maintenance Awards Program, and Compliance and Enforcement. The following report contains details of the results.

Flight Standards administered CSIS and received data before the events of September 11, 2001, which affected the four customer groups in both general and commercial aviation and which could have skewed the results had the survey been conducted after September 11, 2001. However, the results may serve as a baseline for future, post-September 11 surveys of customer service.

After accumulation of the survey results, Flight Standards took considerable time to analyze the results and develop this report to reflect an accurate picture of the results. Survey literature, such as, "Statistical Power, Sample Size, and Their Reporting in Randomized Controlled Trials," by Moher, Dulberg & Wells, indicates the validity of survey results remains over time when there have been a large number of responses. By statistical standards, a return rate of 35 percent is considered substantial. Although other factors, such as dealing with post-September 11 issues, federal budget cuts, the aviation industry's shrinkage, and labor-management instability, influenced the delay in the survey results analysis, Flight Standards' customers have essentially remained the same since the administration of the survey.

Summary of Findings

The Appendices of this report provide detailed results for each question or dimension, but the findings may be summarized as follows:

1. *Overall perception of the services Flight Standards offers were favorable, but there are areas needing improvement.*

Seventy-seven percent of respondents had positive "overall" perceptions of services that Flight Standards had delivered. To a great extent, FSDO and CMO personnel were perceived to be open, honest, polite, and courteous—90 percent positive agreement from respondents.

Close to 80 percent of respondents indicated Flight Standards personnel were adequately qualified to support customers' certificate requirements and knowledgeable about applicable regulations, guidance, and materials.

2. *Perceptions of services provided by Operations employees were marginally less favorable than for Maintenance, Repair Stations, or Training.*

Sixty-six percent of respondents rated Operations employees at FSDO or CMO as providing clear directions, and 61 percent responded that they were timely in their responses. Fifty-one percent of respondents felt Flight Standards employees had provided adequate support for certificate requirements. Operations respondents were also more likely to believe that going through their professional organization resulted in better FAA response than by direct means (42 percent).

3. *Respondents perceived FAA regulations to be adequate to ensure safety, but regulations need to be clearer and more understandable.*

Ninety-one percent of Flight Standards customers agreed that the rules established for the regulation of their companies were adequate to ensure aviation safety. However, approximately 50 percent responded that policies, standards, and regulations were not clear and not understandable.

4. *Lack of consistency in information provided from the same office or between field offices appears to be a major weakness.*

Only about 60 percent of all respondents perceived consistency in information provided by Flight Standards staff *within* a FSDO or CMO office.

Lack of *geographic consistency* was even more striking, with only 19 percent perceiving consistency in information provided *among* different offices.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The Flight Standards Service is considered one of the "operational arms" of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The Flight Standards field workforce is in direct contact with the aviation industry to provide "hands on" safety oversight and various services. Flight Standards' vision is to be recognized and respected as the world leader in system safety through regulation and certification. Our mission is to promote safety of flight for civil aircraft in air commerce. Our core values include quality, timeliness, collaboration, accountability, customer service, and employee contributions.

Flight Standards Aviation Safety Inspectors (ASI) assure the implementation and oversight of safety regulations and compliance with these regulations. The services they provide include certification, surveillance, and investigation of air operators, air agencies, and airmen. Nearly 4,000 ASI are located throughout the United States and overseas in approximately 100 field offices.

According to the Flight Standards Service Strategic Plan in effect when CSIS was administered, a primary goal was to promote positive, responsive, and focused customer relations. That goal has since been reworked into our current Strategic Plan as Goal 3, "Build collaborative relationships internally and externally." Feedback, then, is essential not only for improving the quality of our services but also in achieving true collaboration with industry. To this end, Flight Standards designed CSIS for and with input from the very customers Flight Standards serves.

The CSIS is the third customer satisfaction survey administered by Flight Standards in recent years. It followed the National Pilot Customer Satisfaction and the National Air Maintenance Customer Satisfaction Surveys. Reports pertaining to these previous surveys can be found on the Internet at www.faa.gov/avr/afs/npcssr.

The survey results provide valuable data to both users and the FAA on the effectiveness and efficiency of Flight Standards customer relations, policies, work processes, and quality and delivery of information—as perceived by the customers themselves. Flight Standards will use the survey results to identify areas needing improvement in its services.

METHODOLOGY

POPULATION

The FAA's Flight Standards Evaluation and Analysis Branch, AFS-130, administered the CSIS to executives, managers, and officers of all aviation operators: U.S. national and regional carriers, repair stations, aviation training facilities, air taxis, i.e., operators under 14 CFR parts 91, 121, 125, 131, 133, 135, 137, 141, 142, and 145. Flight Standards used its Vital Information Subsystem database to identify and categorize the prospective respondents. The four major customer groups each received a survey designed for that group:

- (1) Directors of Operations Survey
- (2) Directors of Maintenance Survey
- (3) Directors of Training Survey (for operations and maintenance training)
- (4) Directors, Managers, or Proprietors of Repair Stations Survey

Appendix 1 contains samples of the survey instruments.

RESPONSE RATE

Flight Standards mailed 16,065 surveys. Respondents returned a total of 5,590 completed surveys for a combined return rate of 35 percent. The response rate by customer group was as follows:

- Operations - Directors of Operations Survey: 32 percent response rate (3,278 out of 10,291).
- Maintenance - Directors of Maintenance Survey: 39 percent response rate (151 out of 392).
- Training - Directors of Training Survey: 40 percent response rate (275 out of 683).
- Repair Stations - Directors, Managers, or Proprietors of Repair Stations Survey: 40 percent response rate (1,866 out of 4,699).

CONSTRAINTS

The survey sampled all entities in the four customer groups, i.e., Flight Standards did not use random sample. Random samples reflect specific demographics, and CSIS used a 100 percent sample.

Combined results are over-represented by Operations responses. This group constituted 3,278 respondents or 58 percent of all surveys returned; however, Operations entities comprise the larger percentage of the overall industry population. Next highest were Repair Stations with 1,866 respondents. Maintenance constituted the smallest number of surveys returned, 151 respondents or about 2 percent of all surveys returned. Because of this very small number of returns, even though they may be proportional to the Maintenance population within industry, extrapolation to the larger population is limited and would require further statistical sampling analyses or re-sampling this population. Comparisons to the other customers groups should, thus, be made with caution.

Generally, in this report, we discuss survey results as "overall combined ratings," i.e., average ratings of Operations, Maintenance, Repair Stations, and Training respondents' results. Variation among these groups usually ranged between 10 to 15 percent. In most cases, when a particular customer group's "individual" ratings deviated more than ± 10 percent, this report will discuss it separately.

Lastly, it is important to note the CSIS is not a measure of services delivered but of customer's *perceptions* of services delivered, and how well they met customers' expectations. Survey results must be interpreted within this context.

SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

Since 1998, the Flight Standards' Customer Satisfaction Survey Program Manager worked with stakeholders of various sectors of aviation in identifying the most important topic areas for surveying. In order to further refine the questions for and the design of the final survey instruments, survey developers asked for feedback from members of aviation trade organizations, Flight Standards management and employees, and the inspectors' workforce union, the Professional Airways Systems Specialists (PASS).

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Flight Standards conducted "pre-tests" of various survey instruments for the National Pilot Customer Satisfaction Survey, which was a precursor to CSIS. With the CSIS, Flight Standards built upon experience with previous surveys and also held consultations and feedback sessions with many of the stakeholders to review the relevancy of questions proposed for CSIS. Before Flight Standards administered CSIS, the FAA Office of Aerospace Medicine provided statistical guidance on the survey measures.

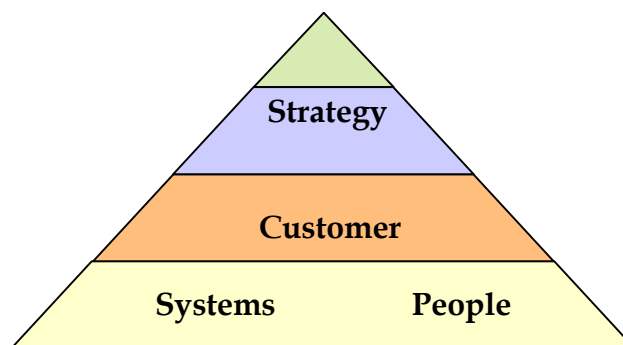
Though this report covers results from a survey conducted in the first part of FY 2000, the large number of completed surveys returned validates the results over time. The 35 percent return rate is considered relatively high for surveys of this type, and survey research literature suggests that strong positive or negative responses appear to hold over time as well (Moher, Dulberg & Wells, 1994). Also, though the aviation industry is currently in turbulent times, the population of aviation operators surveyed generally consisted of executives, managers, and officers, i.e., likely a more stable population and, thus, less prone to turnover.

Furthermore, this survey's results can also serve as a baseline of perceptions of Flight Standards services before the events of September 11, 2001, which greatly affected both general and commercial aviation. Because Flight Standards is in the position of enforcing or educating the aviation industry about certain new and controversial security requirements, pre-September 11 data will be invaluable in assessing whether industry perceives this "third-party" intervention as affecting Flight Standards' overall mission and customer service.

DIMENSIONS

Several experts have developed models that describe service quality characteristics and their relationship to the customer. In addition to using previous Flight Standards customer survey formats, Flight Standards framed CSIS' dimensions, in part, on Karl Albrecht's (1992) "Service Triangle" model and Parasuraman's, et. al., (1988 and 1991) original 10 dimensions of service quality.

SERVICE TRIANGLE



Albrecht's triangular model (above) places the customer at the center of the organization. The items of the triangle, the strategy, employees, and systems of Flight Standards, must all be aligned to deliver value to Flight Standards customers. Each point on the triangle is crucial to determining customer satisfaction.

Based on past experience, management requests, and interviews and consultations with industry and trade organizations, Flight Standards also selected 5 of Parasuraman's dimensions of service quality: Reliability, Courtesy, Credibility, Communications, and Understanding the Customer. We developed questions to correspond to these 5 dimensions and then categorized them to address specific areas that Flight Standards had historically identified as needing improvement.

CATEGORIES

The survey requested customer perceptions in 5 major areas:

- *Customer Services Satisfaction*, to include, openness and honesty; clarity of directions; politeness and courtesy; timeliness; knowledge; policies, standards, and regulations; and consistency of service.
- *Communications Preferences*, i.e., degree of in-person or telephonic contact, as well as use of the Internet and electronic mail.
- *Channeling of Unresolved Issues*, i.e., degree to which customers went to external organizations, the Administrator, or Congress to address unresolved issues.
- *Maintenance Awards Program*, i.e., familiarity, encouragement to use, and percent of rewards given.
- *Compliance and Enforcement*, i.e., percent receiving of letters of investigation and use of self-disclosure process.

INSTRUMENT DESIGN AND SCALES

The survey included a total of 45 questions spread through 7 sections as follows. The 5 survey dimensions were interwoven throughout the first 5 sections.

- Section 1. Company and Participant Information*
- Section 2. Contact and Communications with Flight Standards*
- Section 3. Certificate Management*
- Section 4. Compliance and Enforcement*
- Section 5. Overall Assessment of Flight Standards Service*
- Section 6. Specific Comments*
- Section 7. General Comments.*

The survey used a combination of response scales. These included both Likert's 5-point scale of "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" and a "yes/no" scale for

questions that sought further information unique to each section. Appendix 1 provides samples of each of the 4 survey instruments.

SURVEY FINDINGS

This report presents the findings by general category with specific dimensions and other related questions. Detailed responses to each of the dimensions can be found in tables and graphs found in Appendix 2.

CUSTOMER SERVICES SATISFACTION

This section asked for an overall assessment of Flight Standards services, consistency of service, and the customer service dimensions: openness and honesty; clarity of directions; politeness and courtesy; timeliness; knowledge; policy, standards, and regulations.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Overall, how would you rate the service Flight Standards has given your company in the past year?

Seventy-seven percent of respondents gave positive indications about Flight Standards' Customer Service. The overall rating came out to "fairly good," meaning there is room for further improvement. Repair Stations had the highest satisfaction level at 85 percent, followed by Training at 79 percent, and then Operations at 75 percent. Maintenance had a 70 percent satisfaction level.

OPENNESS AND HONESTY

In dealing with FSDO or CMO employees regarding activities such as change of operations specifications, waivers, etc., how much would you agree that Flight Standards personnel were open and honest?

The majority of responses, 87 percent, indicated a perception that, overall, Flight Standards employees were open and honest in their dealings with the public. Repair Stations' perceptions were highest at 92 percent, followed by Training at 88 percent. Operations and Maintenance perceptions were both at the 84 percent level.

If you took the concerns of your company to another office in Flight Standards, do you agree that the employees were open and honest?

Overall, an average of 44 percent of respondents who took their concerns to another FSDO/CMO, region, or division at Flight Standards headquarters agreed that the employees were open and honest. Maintenance had the lowest result at 34 percent agreement. Operations had 46 percent agreement.

CLARITY OF DIRECTIONS

In dealing with FSDO or CMO employees regarding activities such as change of operations specifications, waivers, etc., how much would you agree that Flight Standards personnel gave clear directions?

Overall, respondents perceived Flight Standards employees gave customers clear directions 73 percent of the time. Repairs Stations were most positive at 80 percent, followed by Training at 76 percent, Maintenance at 72 percent, and Operations at 66 percent.

If you took the concerns of your company to another office in Flight Standards, do you agree that you were given clear directions?

Overall, 62 percent of all customers who took their concerns to a second office perceived they had been given clear directions. Thirty-eight percent did not. The percentages across the four types of air operators and across organizations ranged within the 60th percentile.

POLITENESS AND COURTESY

In dealing with FSDO or CMO employees regarding activities such as change of operations specifications, waivers, etc., how much would you agree that Flight Standards personnel were polite and courteous?

The vast majority, 90 percent, of respondents perceived FSDO and CMO employees to be polite and courteous. Repair Stations rated highest at 94 percent, followed by Maintenance at 89 percent, Training at 88 percent, and Operations at 87 percent.

If you took the concerns of your company to another office in Flight Standards, do you agree that the employees were polite and courteous?

Overall, 90 percent of respondents indicated agreement as to perceptions of politeness and courtesy on a visit to a *second* office. The range was 76 percent for Maintenance at FSDO or CMO to 98 percent Maintenance at Flight Standards regions.

During any investigation that may have resulted, how much would you agree that Flight Standards acted courteously?

Overall, 76 percent of customers agreed that Flight Standards employees were polite and courteous during investigations. Results for each of the four operational groups were within the 76-percentile range with Training having the highest percentage (80 percent) and Operations the lowest percentage (68 percent). The nature of investigations and the scrutiny it puts operators under may possibly account for this lower rating.

TIMELINESS

In dealing with FSDO or CMO employees regarding activities such as change of operations specifications, waivers, etc., how much would you agree that Flight Standards personnel were timely in their responses?

Overall, 71 percent of respondents perceived Flight Standards employees as being timely in their dealings with customers. Repair Stations were the most favorable at 78 percent, followed by Maintenance 73 percent, Training at 70 percent, and Operations at 61 percent.

If you took the concerns of your company to another office in Flight Standards, do you agree that the employees were timely in their responses?

A visit to a second office resulted in slightly lower perceptions of timeliness, with an overall average agreement of 64 percent, with a range of 53 percent for Operations at headquarters to 78 percent for Repair Stations in the field level.

If the services or responses mentioned above (another office) were not timely, did the delay interfere with commerce of your company?

Sixty-one percent of the respondents perceived that the timeliness of Flight Standards employees located at a second office did not interfere with the commerce of their company. Thus, for 39 percent, timeliness was an issue that interfered with their business when concerns were taken to a

second office. Respondents indicated Training at the highest level of interference (45 percent) and Operations the lowest at 31 percent.

In the past, if your company's commerce was affected by lack of timeliness, at which of the Flight Standards offices was the delay a problem?

Overall, 73 percent of the respondents whose company's business was affected by the lack of timeliness attributed the delay to the local FSDO or CMO. Training had the highest perception of negative impact at 84 percent.

KNOWLEDGE

In dealing with FSDO or CMO employees regarding activities such as change of operations specifications, waivers, etc., how much would you agree that Flight Standards personnel were adequately qualified to support your certificate requirements?

Overall, 72 percent of respondents perceived that Flight Standards employees were qualified to support their certificate requirements. Maintenance, Repair Stations, and Training were all above 75 percent. However, Operations responses were rated at 51 percent.

If you took the concerns of your company to another office in Flight Standards, do you agree that the employees were knowledgeable about the applicable regulations, guidance material, and policy?

Overall, respondents indicated an average of 70 percent agreement on this question. The range was from 56 percent agreement for Maintenance at the FSDO or CMO level to 84 percent agreement for Training at the headquarters level.

In dealing with FSDO or CMO employees regarding activities such as change of operations specifications, waivers, etc., how much would you agree that Flight Standards personnel were knowledgeable about the applicable regulations, guidance material, and policy?

Overall, 76 percent of the responses were positive. Repair Stations perceptions were highest at 82 percent and Operations lowest at 68 percent.

POLICIES, STANDARDS, AND REGULATIONS

How much would you agree that the rules established for the regulation of your company are adequate to ensure aviation safety?

Overall, 91 percent of Flight Standards customers agree that the rules established for the regulation of their companies were adequate to ensure aviation safety.

How much do you agree that policies, standards, and regulations are clear and understandable?

Overall, for all four customer groups, nearly 50 percent responded that policies, standards, and regulations were not clear and not understandable. Maintenance had the highest positive disagreement at 54 percent followed by Operations at 48 percent.

CONSISTENCY OF SERVICE

How much would you agree that there is consistency in information provided by Flight Standards employees at the local office?

Overall, 57 percent of all respondents perceived that there was consistency in information provided by Flight Standards employees at local offices. Repair Stations had the highest perception at 62 percent, followed by Training at 59 percent, Maintenance at 55 percent, and Operations at 54 percent.

How much would you agree that there is geographic consistency in information provided by Flight Standards field offices, though they are in different locations?

Eighty-one percent of respondents indicated disagreement with this statement. Maintenance was the least positive at 17 percent, followed by Operations and Repair Stations at 19 percent, then Training at 23 percent. Thus, fewer than 20 percent of all respondents reported that there is geographic consistency in information provided by Flight Standards field offices.

If you took the concerns of your company to another office in Flight Standards, do you agree that you received a response similar to that of the original office?

Only 43 percent of respondents who took concerns of their company to another office agreed that they received a similar response to the original office. Fifty-seven percent disagreed. When “another office” was a region, 48 percent agreed with the statement (52 percent disagreed), and for headquarters, 47 percent agreed and 53 percent disagreed.

During any investigation that may have resulted, how much would you agree that there was geographic consistency in the enforcement of the regulations?

Overall, 39 percent of respondents were in positive agreement that there was geographic consistency. Twenty-six percent were neutral, and 35 percent were negative. Operations had the highest perception of lack of geographic consistency at 67 percent, followed by Training at 63 percent, Maintenance 60 percent, and Repair Stations at 56 percent.

COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

As a representative of your company, how do you communicate with Flight Standards?

Customers responded that their most used means of communications with FS offices are: first the telephone (27 percent), followed by in-person visits and paper correspondence (each 22 percent). Eighteen respondents use faxes, and, finally, 9 percent use electronic mail. Among the four groups, Operations had the highest number of responses for telephone and in-person contact (31 percent and 23 percent respectively) but the lowest usage of electronic mail at 6 percent.

Does your company have access to e-mail or the Internet?

Ninety-three percent of all respondents reported having access to the Internet and/or use of e-mail. Respondents in Training and Maintenance reported the highest access at 96 percent each, followed by Repair Stations at 91 percent, then Operations at 87 percent.

What percent of the time do you, as a representative of your company, communicate with Flight Standards using the Internet or E-mail?

Overall, 44 percent of respondents reported using the Internet and/or e-mail up to 25 percent of the time they communicate with Flight Standards. Sixty-six percent of those in Training reported using the Internet and/or e-mail up to 75 percent of the time. Maintenance was second highest at 61 percent using the Internet and or e-mail up to 75 percent of the time.

How much do you agree that, as a representative of your company, you are able to communicate effectively with Flight Standards through the Internet or e-Mail?

Overall, 51 percent of all respondents indicated that they viewed the Internet/e-mail as a viable means of effectively communicating with Flight Standards.

CHANNELING OF UNRESOLVED ISSUES

How much would you agree that communicating your needs through your professional organization (e.g., ATA, RAA, AOPA, NBAA, etc.) results in better FAA response than by direct means?

There was little support for customers going through professional organizations to obtain better FAA responses. Overall, 29 percent perceived this to be a better approach than going directly to the FAA. Operations personnel were more likely to follow this route with a 49 percent positive response rate. Maintenance personnel were least likely at 21 percent.

If your company had a concern or issue that could not be resolved by a Flight Standards office, which of the offices was involved?

Overall, 42 percent of respondents stated they went to an office outside of the FAA. Fifty-seven percent of Operations and 55 percent of Repair Stations reported going outside FAA. This contrasts with Maintenance and Training's 28 percent and 27 percent respectively.

Operations respondents—57 percent positive responses—and Repair Station respondents—55 percent positive responses—were the mostly likely to go outside of the FAA system when a concern or issue could not be resolved at the local Flight Standards office. This contrasts with Maintenance and Training's 28 percent and 27 percent respectively.

In the past year, if your company contacted congressional representative(s) or the FAA Administrator with an issue that could not be resolved by Flight Standards, which of the offices was involved?

Overall, 81 percent of respondents did not elevate their unresolved concern or issue to the FAA Administrator or a member of Congress. Forty-five percent of respondents involved the local FSDO or CMO, 32 percent the Regional Office, and 23 percent Flight Standards Headquarters. Operations and Repair Stations tended to be the most likely to elevate to the FSDO and CMO with a 50 percent positive response rate. Maintenance personnel were most likely to elevate to Regional Offices with a 42 percent positive response rate. The percentage for Training personnel was 35 percent.

MAINTENANCE AWARDS PROGRAM

(NOTE: the Maintenance Awards Program does not apply to Directors of Operations)

Does your company encourage your Aviation Maintenance Technicians (AMT) to participate in FAA's AMT Awards Program?

Overall, 77 percent of maintenance, repair stations, and training personnel responded that they are familiar with the FAA's Aviation Maintenance Technicians (AMT) awards program, with 63 percent stating they were encouraged to participate. Maintenance personnel had the highest familiarity at 93 percent, and 65 percent of these felt encouragement from their companies. Sixty-four percent of Repair Stations were familiar with the program, but only 53 percent felt encouraged. Training were the most encouraged at 70 percent while having average familiarity with the Award Program at 73 percent.

What percent of your employees received an AMT Award during 1999?

Approximately half (47 percent) of Maintenance personnel surveyed received an AMT award during 1999. This is based on 151 responses to 392 surveys that were mailed out. Twenty-one percent of Repair Stations and 26 percent of Training personnel received awards.

Has your company received recognition for employee participation in the AMT program?

Forty-one percent of maintenance organizations reported receiving recognition of some kind for their employees' participation in the AMT Program. Repair Stations and Training were low with 17 percent and 16 percent respectively.

COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

Has your company received a Letter of Investigation any time in the past 3 years?

Maintenance was the most likely to receive a letter of investigation within the last 3 years with a 47 percent positive response rate. Others were much less likely: Operations 13 percent, Repair Stations 16 percent, and training 17 percent.

Has your company used the self-disclosure process?

Maintenance personnel appear to be the most frequent users of the self-disclosure process: Seventy-two percent of Maintenance respondents reported having used it. Other groups know about the process but have not used it: Repairs Stations 51 percent, Operations 48 percent, and Training 41 percent.

Has the self-disclosure process worked well?

Of those who did use the self-disclosure process, 81 percent of Training, 80 percent of Maintenance, 76 percent of Repair Stations, and 72 percent of Operations reported that the process worked well.

DISCUSSION OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Overall, survey results show that respondents have favorable perceptions of the services provided by Flight Standards. Collectively, the respondents indicated that the service Flight Standards had given to their company the year before the survey was 77 percent positive, 13 percent neutral, and 10 percent negative. Repair Station customers were the most favorable at 85 percent positive, followed by Training at 79 percent positive, Operations at 75 percent positive, and Maintenance at 70 percent positive. One subjective measure of customer service is how customers feel they have been treated. Respondents to CSIS perceived FSDO or CMO personnel to be open and honest (87 percent combined average positive agreement) and polite and courteous (90 percent combined average positive agreement). These percentages may be acceptable as they stand, and reducing the unfavorable percentage (13 and 10 percent respectively) may not be feasible or practical.

Other factors have to be considered, as well; for example, the type of interaction which occurred. Was routine information exchanged in a non-adversarial environment, or was the interaction because of a compliance or enforcement issue. Encounters involving possible enforcement action involve heightened emotions and sensitivities where even honesty and courtesy can be perceived negatively. In that context a 10 to 13 percent negative rate may be the norm.

The argument may be made that such high levels of perceived favorability require no further investigation. However, in certain areas, Flight Standards may still need to explore and remedy the relatively low percentage of unfavorable responses. Because the negatives occurred in certain areas critical to Flight Standards' credibility – consistency of knowledge among offices, guidance which was not easy to understand, timeliness, etc. – these areas should be afforded remedial action. Remedial action, however, would require a follow-up survey at some interval after instituting performance measures that address the unfavorable responses.

For example, with the notable exception of Operations at a rate of 61 percent, the respondents perceived Flight Standards to be timely and clear in their responses, with a 76 percent combined positive agreement for Maintenance, Repair Stations, and Training. However, the argument could be made that the services provided to Operations customers are of such a critical nature, that the relatively low negative perception rate (39 percent) must be improved, i.e., that Flight Standards needs to explore why timeliness and clarity cannot be achieved for nearly 40 percent of its customers and then develop strategies to improve that area's favorable rating.

During investigations perceived courteousness dropped to a 76 percent combined average, but all groups remained above 75 percent except for Directors of Operations. Only 68 percent of those surveyed perceived Flight Standards employees to be courteous during investigations. Because of the adversarial nature of the investigative process, this rating may never be improved. Also, Flight Standards does not make policy concerning investigations but must follow a highly structured, legal process derived by another line of business within the FAA. Because of the rigid nature of any legal process and by virtue of the fact that enforcement actions are, by nature, adversarial rather than collaborative, any possible actions to improve this rating may not be feasible.

Respondents indicated that they perceive nearly 80 percent of Flight Standards personnel to be adequately qualified to support customers' certificate requirements and knowledgeable about applicable regulations, guidance, and materials. Again, Operations rated less than the overall rating, and this is one of the key areas that Flight Standards should remedy. Essential to Flight Standards' fulfilling its mission is its credibility, and its stated vision is to be recognized worldwide as setting the standard for safety. Though the overall rating in this area is definitely a strength, the lower rating for Operations could be a weakness and must be addressed.

Respondents never elevated the vast majority of unresolved issues (81 percent) to the FAA Administrator or Congress. In relation to this, most customers also felt they got a better FAA response communicating directly with us than channeling their needs through professional organizations. (Only 24 percent preferred the use of professional organizations.) Again, Operations was the notable exception. Pilots and pilot issues represent a larger portion of airmen, and proportionally there are more pilot-advocate organizations, who charge members dues, than those for Maintenance, Repair Stations, or Training. This may account for the fact that Operations respondents were more likely to "go through" third party advocates (57 percent of respondents) than dealing directly with the FAA on related issues.

A majority of Flight Standards customers agreed that the rules established for the regulation of their companies were adequate to ensure aviation safety (91 percent) and that the self-disclosure process worked well (77 percent). Maintenance was very aware (93 percent) of the FAA's Aviation Maintenance Technicians Awards program while Training (73 percent) and Repair Stations reported were less aware (64 percent) of the awards program. The AMT program, however, is geared toward aviation maintenance technicians, and that may account for its lesser recognition in Repair Stations and Training. Note also, that Training encompasses both pilot and mechanic training. Overall, though, the adequacy of regulations and the use of the AMT awards program as a motivating tool are definite strengths for Flight Standards.

In several survey areas, Operations fared less favorably in the perception of services provided by Flight Standards. On Operations issues, 66 percent of respondents felt Flight Standards personnel gave clear directions, and 61 percent of respondents perceived that they were timely in their responses. Perceptions concerning support for certificate requirements in Operations could also be viewed as a weakness—51 percent positive, 28 percent negative, and 22 percent neutral. Each of these areas' overall rating ranges from one-half to nearly two-thirds of respondents, but this rating also means that fully one-half to one-third of Operations respondents could not comment positively on Flight Standards' timeliness, ability to give clear directions, or support certificate holders. Operators can only comply with clear directions and can only be viable as businesses when we respond in a timely manner to and provide adequate certificate support for their needs. Consequently, this is a case where a high positive rating, which on the surface looks like a strength, may not be high enough and may actually be a potential weakness.

Overall, about half the respondents in each customer group felt that policies, standards, and regulations were clear and understandable; twenty-eight percent responded negatively, and 21 percent were neutral. Thus while the industry sees FAA regulations as being adequate to ensure safety (91 percent agreement), nearly 50 percent find that these rules are not clear or understandable. Even if you eliminate the neutral rating, more than a quarter of respondents have trouble comprehending our regulations.

Lack of consistency of services delivered from the same or different field offices appears to be a major weak area for all four customer groups. Overall, 57 percent were positive, 26 percent negative, and 17 percent neutral. Again, elimination of the 17 percent neutral shows that although a majority of respondents have a favorable perception in this area, fully one-quarter do not. Ratings for consistency of information provided from Flight Standards employees in the same office were similar. Standardization of information is also key to Flight Standards credibility, and this is a possible weakness that must be addressed.

More striking were respondents' poor perceptions of geographic consistency of information provided by Flight Standards field offices in different locations. Overall, 81 percent of perceptions were not positive. This perception was also sustained concerning investigations. Overall, only 39 percent of responses were positive that there was geographic consistency in enforcements. When customers took their concerns to a second office, perceptions of staffs' clear directions, timeliness, and consistency diminished in almost all areas, except for perceptions of openness and honesty and politeness and courtesy. These remained at high levels. Overall, 57 percent disagreed that they would receive a similar response to that of the original

office. This could be perceived as a particularly weak area for Flight Standards, which emphasizes standardization in application of regulatory requirements and policy.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Though overall results are favorable, there is still room for improvement in the satisfaction levels of our customers below the 70 percentile range. Weak "pockets" also exist particularly in the arena of operations. Respondents from all four groups perceive that Flight Standards regulations ensure safety, but at the same time these customers believe that these regulations are neither clear nor understandable. This lack of clarity and understanding may be interrelated to customers' perceptions that Flight Standards employees provide inconsistent information from within the same office and also between different offices. Another plausible explanation is that some of this could, to some degree, be the effect of a "type" of customer who shops around for a positive resolution to their concerns yet continues to be unsatisfied. There may also be a propensity for particular types of information to be more vulnerable to misinterpretation than others. The complexity of the environment and varying degrees of experience of inspectors, of administrative, and of other technical staff may possibly account for some of these perceptions. Or perhaps there is an information systems weak link that needs to be identified.

These survey results affect or reflect upon each of the six Flight Standards Goals. Whereas, Flight Standards conducted this survey well before these goals were developed, CSIS could be construed as validating these goals or that the goals addressed existing problem areas. It is probably more the case that the weak areas the survey identified are systemic and likely have been. The Flight Standards Goals and the survey, then, validate each other as well as emphasize the fact that Flight Standards needs to enact specific activities to improve customers' perceptions of its policies and personnel.

In conclusion, the survey results point to the following recommendations, presented here in no particular order of significance or priority.

1. ***Improve Communication.*** One remedy could be improved internal cross-communications within field offices, between Flight Standards Headquarters and regional offices, and also between Headquarters and field offices and regions and field offices. Flight Standards Goal 3, "Build collaborative relationships *internally* and externally," (emphasis added) is one methodology for addressing improved communications among Flight Standards offices. Goal 6, "Prepare the workforce to accomplish the Flight Standards mission," has the enhancement of communication skills as an achievement strategy. The performance measures relating to these goals should be reexamined in light of the results of this survey

and adjusted or new measures developed to address specifically the inconsistency of information as perceived by customers.

2. ***Develop Remedial Activities.*** A pilot *CSIS Survey Feedback Project* could possibly help tie what was measured by the survey to operating realities and improvement efforts. Possibly in unison with some elements of ISO 9001, a small region could be selected where the survey results would be fed-back to Flight Standards managers and employees. This process would help substantiate the findings and help identify more specific factors contributing to systemic weaknesses, i.e., is inconsistency the result of poor communication or lack of technical knowledge? The affected employees, then, could plan and act upon improvements. For example, those managers and employees in the “test” region could explore the problem areas in depth, identify root causes, then develop remedies which might have nationwide implication.
3. ***Improve Performance Measures.*** Linking customer information to business practices and results is essential to Flight Standards' success. Customer service data needs to be cross-referenced to other technical and non-technical data and outcome measures. The survey results (raw data) and this report should be provided to the Planning and Performance Management Branch, AFS-160, so that organizational performance measures can be adapted to address the weaknesses identified by this report. These specific performance measures should be allowed sufficient time to become incorporated into Flight Standards business and technical processes. This would require, then, a follow-up survey some 3 to 5 years in future to assess the effectiveness of remedial measures.
4. ***Make Employees Aware of Survey Results.*** This report should be provided to all Flight Standards employees via the Intranet. Simple awareness that customers perceive certain aspects of our services as weak can motivate Flight Standards' highly professional workforce a great deal. This solution should not be relied upon as the sole remedial measure, but awareness will go a long way to creating more receptiveness to future customer service initiatives.
5. ***Enhance External Collaboration.*** Whatever remedial or additional, improved performance measures Flight Standards develops, they must be tracked and evaluated and then provided to survey participants. This would contribute to the fulfillment of Goal 3, i.e., building external collaborative relationships, and Goal 6, enhance communications skills, but would also encourage customer participation in any follow-up survey. Moreover, customers' having a true sense of collaboration will result from their being able to trace specific behavioral changes in Flight Standards services directly to their input via the survey.

Periodically, then, Flight Standards should provide an annual update to customers of any actions taken as a result of the CSIS.

6. *Use Existing Customer Service Initiatives.* The Associate Administrator for Regulation and Certification, AVR-1, has announced a nationwide AVR Customer Service Initiative (CSI) which correlates to the FAA Customer Service Initiative released in April 2003. Examination of the FAA and AVR goals of the CSI reveals a serendipitous correlation with the major negative areas revealed by the CSIS. In addition to marketing tools, information on the FAA CSI is located at <http://www2.faa.gov/avr/customerservice/index.cfm> . Specific AVR tools and information are located at <http://intranet.faa.gov/avr/index.cfm?nav=CS> . CSI marketing items—wallet cards, posters, etc.—will be mailed to Flight Standards offices across the country within the next few week. Flight Standards management should issue a memorandum to all employees advising them of the CSI and urging them to familiarize themselves with the information and the tools provided on the above web sites.